GUEST EDITORIAL—THE CITY OF TRANSITION AND THE TRANSITION OF CITIES[1]

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Ten years have passed since the publication of the special issue on the theme of "Chinese Cities and Urbanization" in *Urban Geography* (Vol. 16, No. 6 and No. 7; see Pannell, 1995). Studies on urban China are now becoming a dynamic research area.[3] Recently a number of special issues have appeared in major journals such as *Environment and Planning A* (Lin and Wei, 2002; Wei and Lin, 2002; Li and Wu, 2004), *Urban Studies* (Small, 2002); *Progress in Planning* (Lin, 2004), *Asian Geographer* (Weng and Wei, 2003); and forthcoming in *Habitat International* (Wu and Ma, in press). From time to time, research on China has also appeared in special issues related to the socialist city (e.g., Scarpaci, 2000) and edited volumes based on a team of researchers (e.g., UCRN working group; Ma and Wu, 2005). There are mailing lists such as Urban China, which is open to public subscription (http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/urban-china.html).

With the integration of the Chinese economy into the global economy, China studies have regained importance as the country has changed from rival in the Cold War to global economic partner. But interest in the Chinese city goes beyond describing a specific and perhaps still "exotic" place. The Chinese city not only differs from known and widely studied cases in the West, but also more importantly market-oriented reform and rejoining the world economy have "normalized" research topics on urban China—they are becoming highly relevant to most current debates within the subject of urban geography. In short, the Chinese city is becoming a laboratory for the observation of contemporary urban changes (Wu, 2003).

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[3] In this editorial, I have benefitted from the ideas of many publications. In order to keep this editorial as brief as possible, I do not provide a comprehensive literature review; only those journal special issues related to urban China are cited. Similarly, general studies on western cities, with which the audience of this journal is familiar, are not cited.

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The transformation of the Chinese city presents a two-dimensional complexity: introducing more market mechanisms into a country where there was no pervasive market coordination, and modernizing (now globalizing) the country with fast reindustrialization (i.e., trying to become the world's factory). China thus brings about both the characteristics of post-reform (or even postsocialism) and of the Third World. That is, the Chinese city, as the city of transition (marketization/globalization) may reflect the transition process of the cities in the world. In this two-part special issue, we focus on the changing urban space and changing production of space.

CHANGING URBAN SPACES

The first three papers in this issue focus on urban space: suburbanization (the change in urban internal structure), sociospatial differentiation, and the structure of social space. These studies are all based on more recent census data, often at a "higher" spatial resolution (at urban subdistricts, i.e., street office area, equivalent to the "ward" in the United Kingdom, typically 30,000 to 40,000 residents). While this scale is perhaps too coarse to capture the diversity of urban social space, it is the best resolution available so far. Tremendous efforts have been spent on transferring and validating data and this is worthwhile because the studies highlight microscopic geographical features which so far have not been widely understood. The population census together with the residential mobility survey (see Li and Wu, 2004) reveals the changing spatial configuration of urban everyday lives.

The rapidly growing Chinese city is characterized by urban expansion and population redistribution. Traditionally, Chinese urban built-up areas were compact, but they are now extending into urban-rural fringes, with mushrooming commodity housing estates and various new development zones. Suburbanization is an important topic in urban geography in the west, but only has begun to receive attention in recent years in urban China. Jian Feng and Yixing Zhou use data from four censuses to examine the changing urban international structure, following a series of works done by Yixing Zhou who first introduced the concept of "suburbanization" into China dating back to the 1980s. Their study here is the first one that systematically uses China's population census to portray urban internal structure. The study on Hangzhou reveals that suburbanization started in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s. The redistribution of urban population is accompanied by industrial relocation from central to suburban areas and complicated by the influx of "temporary population" (i.e., rural migrants). Continuing suburbanization, fanned by local government's need to build new urban areas has caused the problem of urban sprawl. Such a notion suggests that the concept of suburbanization is full-fledged urban spatial transformation, since they emphasize that it consists of relocation of population and industries. This transformation is therefore different from the construction of so-called "satellite towns" associated with industrial development in the 1950s. These industrial towns were planned by the government but did not lead to full-fledged urban decentralization because of limited investment and backward transport infrastructure. In the 1990s, however, suburbanization has not only seen an accelerated pace but has also been driven by changing dynamics in land-use policy, rising private car ownership and outward movement of economic activities. More can be seen in the second part of this special issue on changing urban institutions. Moreover, Chinese suburbanization has seen

a distinctive feature of migrant concentration in the urban fringe which complicates the suburban social composition. Along with suburban development, the relocation of residents also follows residential choices for suburban living, in addition to the changes in employment locations encouraged by industrial policy. As such, China's suburbanization is now at the tipping point—without effective policy control, rapid suburban expansion could repeat the problematic American sprawl model.

But redistribution of population means not only changing spatial locations but also differentiation between the different social groups in urban space. Fulong Wu and Zhigang Li first provide a conceptual framework for China's sociospatial differentiation through five major processes: the revealing of historical legacies of inequalities that existed prior to the socialist city and the inequality forged under socialism, fragmentation of the structure of housing provision, marketization of urban development, globalization and economic restructuring, and rural-urban migration. Such conceptualization is based on the notion that the urban built environment is persistent throughout short-term changes and the city is built into a multilayered spatial complex. For example, the notion of upper quarter versus lower quarter did not disappear in the socialist period, though it was concealed by an egalitarian income policy. The difference in the living environment is now capitalized by commodity housing development. The difference forged under socialism in which the inner municipal housing area was underinvested and newer suburban industrial districts received favored support translates into different property prices. Households are positioned in the structure of housing provision and resorted, thus leading to spatial division between workplace compounds, the old city housing area, and commodity housing estates. The market economy geared redevelopment activities to better locations and left dilapidated housing areas untouched. Globalization and economic restructuring reinforced this tendency, as global-oriented activities, often outbidding traditional manufacturing activities, created new spaces for consumption. A unique feature of China's urbanization is that rural migrants are often subjected to various kinds of discrimination. The institutional barriers between urban and rural spaces are forging migrant settlements in the urban fringes. Through comparing demographic composition gained from population census data, Fulong Wu and Zhigang Li examine spatial inequalities at the subdistrict level, which includes but is not limited to: the level of educational attainment, occupational and working status, and the status of household registration (i.e., concentration of migrants). These dimensions in Shanghai are not very different from what has been found in a factor analysis of Beijing.

Social areas analysis is a classical topic in urban geography which has been underresearched but is now gaining new significance in urban China. Market development has increased social differentiation. But the structure of urban social space in China shows different features. Chaolin Gu, Fahui Wang, and Guili Liu analyze Beijing's social space and note four major dimensions: (1) land-use intensity, (2) the presence of migrants (neighborhood dynamics), (3) socioeconomic status, and (4) ethnicity. Social space inequality is not new. Prior to the socialist regime, there was a commonly noted residential pattern to the four geographical sectors in Beijing: "the rich on the west, the high class on the east, the low-income on the north and the poorest on the south." The socialist regime has inserted less functionally differentiated work-unit neighborhoods into this fabric. These work-unit neighborhoods are mostly located in the suburbs, in association with industrial development. Modern planned residences appeared after reform, mostly

built into commodity housing estates. Spatially, social areas present in concentric zones (land-use intensity), sector (migrant presence), hybrid zone-sector (socioeconomic status) and multinuclei (ethnicity). The presence of an ethnicity dimension is unusual as China is populated by relatively homogenous Han ethnicity, but this is not so in Beijing. In Shanghai there are concentrations of subethnicity based on place of origin. Compared with western cities, Gu et al. note that there is an absence of family status, and that socio-economic status is becoming evident and has accelerated only in recent years.

CHANGING INSTITUTIONS

The next two papers consider changing institutions under reform and various implications for city politics, development planning and urban poverty generation. These studies examine concrete institutional set-ups and thus go beyond dichotomous state and market forces.

The dramatic transformation of the built environment has made urban master plans out of date. Planning Chinese cities thus imposes a challenge to both city managers and planners because the "single" instrument—a masterly designed blueprint—has become incompatible with a dynamic institution that is constantly changing but does so in a gradual and incremental manner. Yehua Wei reveals the limits of planning institutions under transition. His study on the case of Hangzhou city plans suggests an interesting trend: economic decentralization has granted the local state an increasing power of regulation. The local state is acting as an entrepreneurial state and major agent promoting urban transformation, and yet the incremental nature of "muddling through" has undermined the institutional foundations of planning intervention. Yehua Wei highlights the fact that urban planning in China has become increasingly political rather than a purely technical process in the planned economy. Planning is now playing a role in promoting growth rather than constraining it. The establishment of four national-level development districts plus massive migration into the city of Hangzhou, has led to the size of the population exceeding the planned target. Moreover, Wei illustrates how planning through various locally initiated development schemes is now considered as a tool for strengthening the city in the new round of economic competition. Under the politics of growth, city planning is subject to enormous pressure and even blamed for failing to foresee demand and implement city plans, while the development process has been widely opened up to multiple forces beyond the domain of state planning.

Urban poverty is an emerging issue in China. Ya Ping Wang points out that the employment structure inherited from the planned economy is now being restructured. This restructuring has led to mass redundancy for workers, who are now increasingly marginalized in their share of economic progress. Economic restructuring affects poor residents to a greater extent. For the elite with political and social capital, the shift from the traditional to the post-reform system requires only a small adjustment. But for marginal social groups, such a transition means jumping a formidable gap. Such a gap, argues Wang, could be a poverty trap. His finding from household surveys in two cities, Shengyang and Chongqing, suggests that "between 40 and 50% of households living in the poor areas had an income below the official poverty line." Does this astonishing finding imply that these communities are now becoming the equivalent of so-called "outcast ghettos" (Marcuse, 1997), which are detached from mainstream economic activities in

the post-Fordist economy in the West? The intervention of the municipal government is critical to prevent the concentration of large-scale urban poor. So far poverty alleviation policy focuses on economic hardship without adequate attention paid to area-based exclusion and social inclusion based on the notion of "citizenship." Seen in this way, it is possible to challenge the design of economic policies which have paid more attention to new middle-income groups than to the real poor. The poor are not seen as a source of effective market "demand" to propel economic growth. The fear of social welfare discouraging economic incentive views marginal groups as passive consumers rather than active citizens. Research into urban poverty, marginalization and low-income communities will thus open up a wide range of possibilities for studying the city of difference under the market economy and understanding how these differences activate urban politics and in turn reshape the urban environment.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The geographical scholarship of the Chinese city has progressed significantly over the last decade. Papers presented in this special issue go beyond describing phenomena in specific areas and move closer to current studies in the urban geography of North America and Western Europe. This is because, first, the Chinese city is undergoing transformation, partially led by market forces and, second, researchers are now equipped with wider theoretical perspectives and better methods including the use of spatial data. By suggesting that the Chinese city presents some topics similar to those of the "western" city, I do not mean to imply a trajectory of convergence. What we have seen is that the Chinese city should no longer be described as an idiosyncratic and irrelevant case; rather, the patterns and processes of China's urban transformation form a broad picture of contemporary urban changes. Emerging studies on Chinese cities further highlight the different institutions affecting these changes.

To sum up, there are two major forms of progress shown in this special issue. First, the development of detailed analysis based on better spatial data is beginning to reveal changing *urban space* in a more systematic way. The analysis of census and the use of social survey, for example, are becoming empirical methods in urban China research. Although the availability of data still constrains more complex analysis, progress has been made. Second, there is a more sophisticated understanding of the changing *urban institution* which is leading to spatial changes and at the same time being contested by actors involved in spatial changes. Planning and city politics are evolving around the new institution.

Across these topics, we find something in common with what has been observed elsewhere:

- Urban dispersion through redistribution of population and economic activity and the trend of suburbanization accelerated since the 1990s;
- Greater sociospatial differentiation and even fragmentation of the urban social fabric;
- The formation of a new social geography of the city;
- A shift toward locally based growth regimes through coalitionist local politics;
- Economic functionality of city planning strengthened through moving from passive development control and externality elimination toward active place promotion; and

- Emerging low-income communities and area-based urban poverty, especially in the form of "pockets of poverty."

On the surface, these trends merely reconfirm the overall trajectory of the post-Fordist and neoliberal city. However, looking into the detailed patterns and processes of urban changes, the following novelties can be found:

- Newly marketizational space (through land and housing commoditization), driven by consumer choice for suburban living, is "materialized" by the ambitious local state which is concerned more with "opening up the revenue of capital accumulation" than with redistribution.
- Spatial inequalities are being produced by translating different existing divisions into urban reality: exogenous versus indigenous, urban versus rural, inner city versus industrial areas, global versus local, and "insider versus outsider of the state system." Such differences are revitalized, forged and materialized.
- Social geographical patterns are being created but are different from the classical model of the capitalist city. These are formed both with socialist and newly commodified urban development and built upon the extent of development (intensity), income (socioeconomic status), the status of migrants and ethnicity. Internal migrants, similar to immigrants in the literature of global cities, are excluded and distributed at different locations. But in contrast to immigrants, rural migrants are forming transition zones outside the city instead of surrounding the center. This is a hybrid product of the institution of household registration and a newly created market of rural laborers.
- Aggressive entrepreneurial endeavors are seen but these are built upon city politics different from the "civic boosterism" of a "democratic" society. The phenomenon is specific to the transition (and the legacies) of institutions and the politics of land, and even more of the persistent endeavors of the state to reengineer space.
- Planning is in an ambiguous position, similar to what has confronted "postmodern" U.S. planning (Beauregard, 1989). But the legacy of socialist planning simultaneously creates new room for maneuver while subjecting the contemporary planner to the greater pressures of potential failure and the impossibility of regulation within city politics.
- Production of the new urban poor is associated both with the market logic of production and consumption and with the institutions forged prior to the introduction of the market. The causes of urban poverty present a complex picture of different marginalization: marginalization of the "core" labor force under state socialism and marginalization of commodified rural laborers. In addition, low-income communities are the spatial product of state and market logics.

To summarize novelty in urban China, we can see it is a hybrid combination of and synergetic interaction between state and market forces within the overall context of transition toward a more market-oriented urban regime. This is not irrelevant to the Western audience as the latter is experiencing "neoliberalizing space" (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

In one sense, this special issue is not only for China "specialists" but also for those who work on similar topics but in different contexts: be it the "mainstream" geography of Los Angeles, the Third World city, or the "global city." I am confident that through

comparative eyes, familiar issues such as "suburbanization" and "social exclusion" suddenly become distinctively novel in a different context. To conclude, all cities are "transitional" but they change in particular ways defined by the dialectics of the production of space. I hope the Chinese city, as the city of transition, reflects the transition of cities in a novel and distinctive way.

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